## ***Ranunculus populago*** Mertens & Koch

mountain buttercup

Ranunculaceae (Buttercup Family)

**Status:** State Sensitive
**Rank:** G4S2

**General Description:** Adapted from Hitchcock et al. (1964): This perennial is to sparsely stiff haired. The one to several stems are usually erect but sometimes prostrate (growing along the ground), 4 to 16 in. (10-40 cm) long, somewhat hollow, often branched above the base, and not rooting at the nodes if prostrate. The basal leaves have a slender to rather stout petiole that is usually several times as long as the blade. The blade is distinctly heart-shaped to narrowly oval-shaped, ½ to 2 in. (1-5 cm) long and ½ to 2 in. (1-5 cm) broad, with entire to wavy or toothed margins. The lower stem leaves are alternate with short petioles, and the upper stem leaves are nearly opposite and fused to the stem above. The stem leaves are elliptic-lanceolate to ovate and usually somewhat narrower than the basal leaves. There are 1 to 5 flowers on the upper portion of the stem. The flower stalks are slender and up to 2½ in. (6 cm) long. The 5 greenish-yellow sepals are 1/16 to 1/8 in. (2-4 mm) long. The 5 (to sometimes 7) petals are deep yellow, and 1/8 to ¼ in. (4-7 mm) long, and bear a glabrous nectary scale. The pocket-like nectary scale is triangular shaped.

**Identification Tips:** *Ranunculus populago* may be confused with *R. gormanii*. They are both sparsely stiff haired to glabrous. The easiest way to tell the two apart is by their stems. The stems of *R. populago* are erect (but sometimes prostrate) and not rooting at the nodes, while the stems of *R. gormanii* are usually prostrate (to ascending) with roots arising from the nodes. The basal leaves of *R. populago* have a slender to rather stout petiole that is usually several times as long as the blades, while the basal leaves of *R. gormanii* have long, slender, almost threadlike petioles. *R. populago* produces 7-25 fruits (achenes), while *R. gormanii* has 10-15 fruits.

**Phenology:** The taxon is identifiable from April to August. It has been recorded flowering and fruiting in July.

**Range:** In Washington the taxon is found in Pierce and Columbia counties. It occurs east through Idaho to central Montana, and south in central Oregon to California.

**Habitat:** In Washington this species is found in moist meadows,

***Ranunculus populago***
mountain buttercup

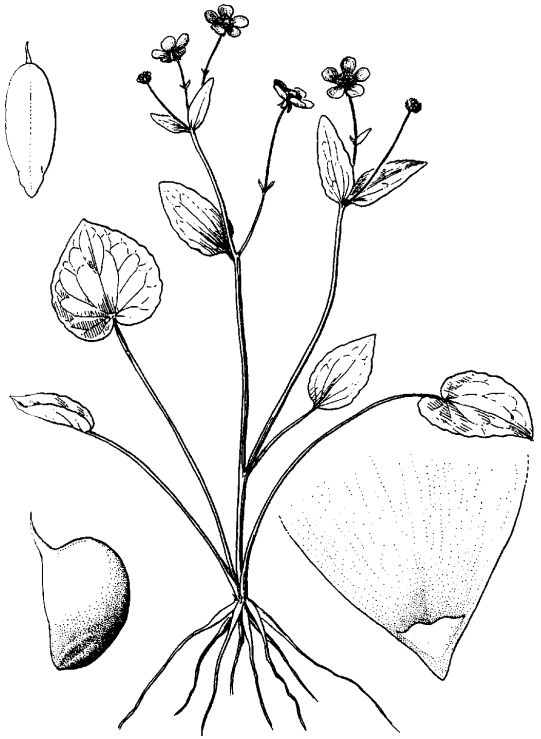
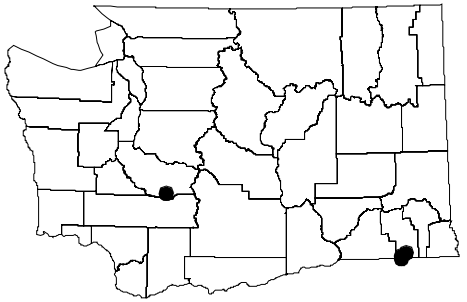



Illustration by Jeanne R. Janish

Known distribution of
*Ranunculus populago*
in Washington



● Current (1980+)
○ Historic (older than 1980)

## *Ranunculus populago*
mountain buttercup


2005 Produced as part of a cooperative project between the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Natural Heritage Program and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. Persons needing this information in an alternative format, call (360) 902-1600 or TTY (360) 902-1125.

## *Ranunculus populago*
mountain buttercup

stream terraces, riparian corridors, open areas along the edge of shrubs, and adjacent to a perennial streams and bogs, at 4480 to 5920 feet (1366-1804 meters) elevation. Associated species at one or more sites include green false hellbore (*Veratrum viride*), Gray's licorice root (*Ligusticum grayi*), marsh leaf cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), alderleaf buckthorn (*Rhamnus alnifolia*), evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*), western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*), and mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*).

**Ecology:** This species has been observed growing out of deep, moist, fine or gravelly to clay soils.

**State Status Comments:** There are fewer than five known occurrences of the taxon in Washington.

**Inventory Needs:** Additional inventory and information of the distribution of *Ranunculus populago* is needed. Documented occurrence sites should be revisited, and suitable habitats in Pierce and Columbia counties should be systematically surveyed for additional populations.

**Threats and Management Concerns:** Definite threats for *Ranunculus populago* have not been identified, though changes in hydrology could be an issue.

**References:**

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, J.W. Thompson. 1964. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest* Part 2: *Salicaceae to Saxifragaceae.* University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. 597 pp.

2005 Produced as part of a cooperative project between the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Natural Heritage Program and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. Persons needing this information in an alternative format, call (360) 902-1600 or TTY (360) 902-1125.